

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 001418

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: HINDU PONTIFF ARRESTED FOR MURDER; LITTLE
PUBLIC ANGER

REF: A) CHENNAI 519

B) CHENNAI 1394

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Tamil Nadu police arrested one of India's most prominent Hindu religious leaders, Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi of Kanchi, accused of murdering a former aide. The arrest has shocked Tamil Nadu, but there is little public anger. The move upset a miniscule group of the AIADMK's Brahmin supporters, but enhanced Jayalalithaa's image as a tough, fearless leader and silenced opponents who criticized her partiality to fellow upper caste Hindus. END SUMMARY

TAMIL NADU POLICE ARREST PROMINENT HINDU PONTIFF

12. (U) On November 11, a special police team from Tamil Nadu arrested one of India's most prominent Hindu religious leaders, Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi of Kanchipuram (aka Kanjivaram), for his alleged role in the murder of a former accountant. The police force flew to Mahaboobnagar, Andhra Pradesh, where Shankaracharya happened to be and arrested him without confrontation. The following morning, they returned Shankaracharya to Chennai and produced him before the First Class Judicial Magistrate of Kanchipuram, the location of his Math (pronounced Mutt), his religious seat and headquarters for his religious organization. He was remanded to 15 days' judicial custody and is currently lodged in Vellore prison, 90 miles west of Chennai.

PONTIFF ACCUSED OF CONSPIRING TO MURDER FORMER AIDE

13. (SBU) The Superintendent of Police of the Cuddalore District told local media that the 70-year-old Shankaracharya played a "significant role" in the September 3 murder of Shankaraman, a former accountant for the Math. According to a report in The Hindu, the police charged the Pontiff under the Indian Penal Code sections for conspiracy, murder and abetment. Senior Chennai journalists told Post that Shankaraman had been publicly questioning perceived irregularities in the Math's accounts after he quit the job and joined a local Vaishnavite (i.e., competing) temple in Kanchipuram. G.C. Shekhar, Principal Correspondent of the Hindustan Times, added, "The police would have got clinching evidence of the Shankaracharya's involvement; otherwise [Tamil Nadu Chief Minister] Jayalalithaa would not have permitted the arrest." State police have also allegedly found evidence of financial transactions between the Math and several men arrested in connection with Shankaraman's killing, in addition to a confession by one of the men linking the Pontiff to the murder.

SHANKARACHARYA A LONGTIME SUPPORTER OF JAYALALITHAA

14. (SBU) Although the AIADMK party is an offshoot of the rationalist DMK, its chief minister, Jayalalithaa is publicly a devout Hindu and devotee of the Kanchipuram Math. In return, the Pontiff publicly supported Jayalalithaa during the controversy over her anti-conversion law. They have also made several public appearances together at religious functions.

DMK CONGRATULATES POLICE, STOPS PROTESTING CASE

14. (SBU) Rather than using the arrest to stir public ire, the opposition party DMK instead canceled a demonstration planned for November 13 protesting inaction on the murder case. DMK President Karunanidhi congratulated the Tamil Nadu police for what he called an "honest action." A bitter opponent

of the Brahmin-dominated Kanchipuram Math, the DMK leader has always kept true to the Dravidian political line, rallying lower castes and rationalists against the Math leadership.

ARREST DOES NOT CAUSE LAW AND ORDER PROBLEMS

16. (SBU) Despite Shankaracharya's prominent stature as a religious leader, his arrest of the Pontiff did not lead to public disturbances in Tamil Nadu. "It is a shocking news, but only the Brahmin community will be angry," said a senior journalist, pointing out that the Brahmins are a tiny minority in the state. Government Secretary (Public Department) Pitchandi added, "The community is shocked, [but] do not plan to react. We do not apprehend any law and order situation developing on this arrest." BJP Chennai District President Kumaravelu said, "He is the patriarch of the Brahmin community, [so] the arrest will not evoke a response amongst a majority of Hindus. I am sure there is considerable evidence of his involvement in the murder." Sources told Post that some Brahmin organizations and possibly the state branch of the VHP are likely to organize demonstrations in the coming days, though did not expect violence.

----- ---
CM FURTHER STRENGTHENS HER HAND BEFORE ELECTIONS

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Since her party's national assembly election debacle earlier in the year, Jayalalithaa has pursued a series of moves that have made the AIADMK a better potential coalition partner. Following the rollback of fiscal reforms (Ref A), the inauguration of the Veeranam water project, and the killing of noted brigand Veerappan (Ref B), the arrest of the Kanchipuram Pontiff gives the chief minister another chance to improve her standing. The DMK had accused Jayalalithaa of not actively pursuing Shankaracharya, which limits their ability to profit from his arrest. Support from a Brahmin community that traditionally supported her will weaken, but that will be offset by support from Tamil masses that do not revere the Kanchipuram Pontiff as much as their own caste and community leaders, film stars, or even politicians. Look for Jayalalithaa to pursue similar measures to consolidate power leading up to the 2006 elections.

HAYNES